

METHUEN MASTER PLAN

DRAFT STRATEGY SHORTLIST

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Overview

The consultant team generated this list based on Methuen's community vision, core themes, and goal statements. The intention is that these strategies use best practices for achieving the community vision, core themes, and goals. The strategies came from existing planning documents, community engagement results, planning best practices, and successful initiatives in similar places. The initial draft strategy list was vetted through interviews with the city board, committee members, and staff to arrive at this draft strategy shortlist. Strategies highlighted in green are generally recommended to stay on the shortlist. Strategies highlighted in red are recommended for removal. Strategies highlighted in yellow need further discussion with the Master Plan Steering Committee because they are either new, the wording significantly changed, or the strategy received differing opinions in the vetting process. The Community Vision Statement follows, and *each strategy is listed under its relevant Core Theme and Goal.*

Community Vision Statement

In 2035...

Methuen will be a fiscally responsible and inclusive northern gateway city and an anchor in the regional economy. Our city will balance new growth while honoring its historic and cultural appeal. It will be defined by its celebration of abundant historic and cultural assets, thriving and walkable Downtown, strong schools, and financially attainable housing. Public services will be delivered through a transparent and efficient government with representative leadership. Methuen will recognize the challenges of our most vulnerable members and rise to meet their needs through proactive engagement strategies. Methuen will have homes appropriate at all stages of life and diverse incomes to support its many long-term residents while welcoming new families and individuals that add to the community's civic life. Our city will be a safe place where all feel comfortable living, working, learning, and playing.

**NOTE: THE VISION ABOVE DOES NOT INCLUDE REFERENCE TO OPEN SPACE, NATURAL RESOURCES, RECREATION, SUSTAINABILITY, OR TRANSPORTATION, AS THESE TOPIC AREAS ARE NOT INCLUDED IN THE SCOPE OF THE MASTER PLAN. HOWEVER, IT IS UNDERSTOOD THAT THESE ARE IMPORTANT AND VALUED ASPECTS OF THE COMMUNITY.*

Core Theme One

FOSTER BALANCED HOUSING & ECONOMIC GROWTH IN STRATEGIC LOCATIONS AND PROMOTE SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT.

Goals & Strategies

- 1A. Provide a broader range of housing options, including tenure, price points, and housing types in residentially zoned districts.

STRATEGY CODE	STRATEGY NARRATIVE
1.A1	Create a zoning ordinance and design guidelines to encourage multi-family and mixed-use housing consistent with Section 3A of the Zoning Act. Review zoning ordinance for consistency regarding multi-family density between sections and the Table of Dimensional regulations.
1.A2	Update/revise the existing Affordable Housing Density Bonus Special Permit (Section XI-D(7)) to better align with current financially attainable housing goals and market conditions. Revise to include a requirement for Inclusionary Zoning for 10 or more units with additional units allowed by special permit with additional financially attainable units. Consider a lower or higher percentage of Area Median Incomes (AMI) while keeping the SHI requirements in mind.
1.A3	Revise existing Accessory Apartment (Section V-G) to align with the State's new definition in The Affordable Homes Act of 2023, Section 12. Take advantage of the state Accessory Dwelling Unit program of loans or grants created to help homeowners or tenants with a household member with severe disabilities (including elders) in making modifications to build an accessory unit.
1.A4	Review existing zoning districts to determine appropriate locations to support a wider range of housing types: such as duplexes, triplexes, and townhouses at a higher density than currently allowed (4-8 units per acre).
1.A5	Reintroduce the Community Preservation Act (CPA) as a critical source of funding to develop low-income housing, as well as for historic preservation and open space and recreation programming.
1.A6	Establish an Affordable Housing Trust (AHT) to advocate for the importance of financially attainable housing and to provide financial assistance to low-income homeowners and renters. An AHT would manage funds generated from inclusionary zoning, local or state funding (e.g., Community Preservation Act if adopted), and other housing programs that may arise from the Affordable Homes Act of 2023 to achieve targets set in the Housing Production Plan, as well as partner with local nonprofit developers, to build deeply subsidized housing for vulnerable populations.
1.A7	Create a Housing Coordinator position within DECD to apply for and manage housing grants and programs, staff an Affordable Housing Trust and Community Preservation Committee (if created), and partner with non-profits. This position could be funded using Community Development Block Grant funds or Community Preservation Funds.
1.A8	Review/Update Zoning Ordinance and Map to align lot sizes and setback requirements to the building type that exists on the ground. This may result in smaller lot sizes and setbacks, as large sections of the current 80,000 SF zoned areas contain much smaller lots.
1.A9	Apply for funding from new programs detailed in the Affordable Homes Act (2023) and the Housing Development Incentive Program to increase Methuen's supply of financially attainable housing.

1B. Promote economic development.

STRATEGY CODE	STRATEGY NARRATIVE
1.B1	Explore opportunities to expand or further protect Industrial and Commercial zoning districts with the best highway access.
1.B2	Create an inventory of unused/underused commercial and industrial properties and publicize their availability to businesses and developers (Merrimack Valley Planning Commission).
1.B3	Create district plans for the existing commercial and industrial areas that establish clear visions for future uses and infrastructure investment. Be careful not to block future opportunities; establish a short list of target industries and tailor city services and policies toward attracting them.
1.B4	Create an Economic Planner position in City Hall to guide small businesses through startup and permitting; outreach to business and property owners; establish a local technical assistance program to support small and locally owned retailers across the city; establish incentives for minority- and women-owned businesses; and conduct an Economic Development Strategic Planning process to develop citywide and subarea goals for development, job growth, and services.
1.B5	Develop an inventory of previously developed brownfields or blighted strategic urban areas to provide mixed-used opportunities.
1.B6	Conduct plans for the Historic Downtown, MSBC, and the Loop, focusing on streetscape redesign emphasizing the pedestrian experience, small business development as opposed to formula businesses, reducing visible surface parking, and identifying opportunities for programmable open space to support cultural and business activities.
1.B7	Review and amend existing commercial parking requirements to meet local needs and current standards.

Core Theme Two

CREATE SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT PUBLIC SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE.

Goals & Strategies

- 2A. Continue governing and fiscal best practices while building sustainable staff capacity and professional development.

STRATEGY CODE	STRATEGY NARRATIVE
2.A1	Remain current with the latest financial software to manage financials, procurement, human resources, payroll, and revenue, and provide ongoing training to staff.
2.A2	Use asset and facilities management software to develop an inventory of existing public infrastructure assets, current infrastructure conditions, and priorities for maintenance or rehabilitation., and provide ongoing training to staff. Create detailed equipment, facilities, and infrastructure management plan(s). Outsource initially or increase capacity as necessary to implement.
2.A3	Continue to create and maintain a long-range financial forecast regarding debt affordability, liabilities such as pensions, OPEB (Other Post-Employment Benefits), economic development strategies, reserve policies, and asset management strategies.
2.A4	Evaluate current staffing levels and salaries across departments and positions relative to comparable communities. Create a 5-year staff operating plan using benchmarking.
2.A5	Continue to host regular training for municipal and school staff, including Diversity Equity and Inclusion, sexual harassment, safety, the on-demand language translation service, and other software platforms.

- 2B. Strategically invest in sustainable and resilient public infrastructure.

STRATEGY CODE	STRATEGY NARRATIVE
2.B1	Continue to fund the City's water system (drinking water and fire protection) and infrastructure as recommended in the most recent Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Plan or as required by state or federal law.
2.B2	Update the stormwater ordinance and re-evaluate combined sewer overflows (CSOs) (what is needed and where).
2.B3	Seek opportunities to increase municipal buildings' use of renewable energy, such as solar panels on roofs and carport solar canopies.
2.B4	Explore opportunities for school and municipal vehicle electrification.
2.B5	Prioritize Green Building Design standards for new and renovated buildings.

2C. Continue to explore the creation of new or updated municipal facilities and equipment, especially Public Safety, City Hall, and the Department of Public Works.

STRATEGY CODE	STRATEGY NARRATIVE
2.C1	Relocate the DPW Facility, including advancing the conceptual design and finalizing a site.
2.C2	Assess locations for a Public Safety Facility to optimize the ability to respond to emergencies City-wide.
2.C3	Continue to repair and renovate City Hall to advance physical and technical accessibility.
2.C4	Adopt landscaping guidelines for new and renovated municipal buildings.
2.C5	Determine the future use of city-owned property at 180 Pleasant Valley Street.
2.C6	Continue maintenance of all schools with attention to safety features, roofs, playgrounds, and energy-saving initiatives. Continue to update the 2016 Schools Capital Improvement Plan to prioritize school projects.
2.C7	Continue implementing the comprehensive transitional plan for the Americans with Disabilities Act and Massachusetts Access Board regulations in the city.

2D. Ensure transparent and accessible government services and structures.

STRATEGY CODE	STRATEGY NARRATIVE
2.D1	Work towards all public meetings being televised and recorded for on-demand viewing, including closed captioning for language access and adding funding and capacity as needed.
2.D2	Restart a Charter Change Commission to consider changing the government structure to extend terms from two to four years.
2.D3	Consider expanding programming for residents to meet Department Heads and public safety officials (like the Senior Activity Center and Methuen Arlington Neighborhood). For example, in-person neighborhood group meetings, using community connections to advertise resources and programs, or recorded interviews with Department Heads.
2.D4	Improve municipal communication centralized from the mayor's office, including in various languages, and utilize the city's website (with notifications and improved ADA accessibility), reverse 911 alerts, the government channel, and social media. Do targeted outreach to low-income residents, ethnic and racial minorities, and non-English speaking residents, for example, through Spanish newspapers and radio.
2.D5	Optimize the use of the Smart 911 system, including the incorporation of multiple languages. Methuen public safety departments could share local dispatch resources if a joint public safety building is created.
2.D6	Update the See-Click-Fix software and do ongoing DPW employee training with accountability. Continue to advertise this resource to residents. In the long term, build up to a staffed 311 system (Resident hotline).

Core Theme Three

ADVOCATE FOR HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELL-BEING THROUGH PLANNING & DESIGNING FOR THOSE WITH THE MOST VULNERABILITIES AND FEWEST CHOICES

Goals & Strategies

3A. Strengthen connections to community and health services, especially behavioral health.

STRATEGY CODE	STRATEGY NARRATIVE
3.A1	Continue to seek opportunities to increase funding for trauma-informed substance abuse programming within the Methuen Public Schools.
3.A2	Continue to seek funding to decrease counselor to student ratio in the Methuen Public Schools.
3.A3	Continue efforts to create full-time mental health and social work positions within the Methuen Police Department.
3.A4	Seek designation for Methuen as an age-friendly and dementia-friendly community through an age-friendly community network, such as AARP Livable Communities.
3.A5	Collaborate with the Center for Behavioral Health to host wellness programming.
3.A6	Work with the Health Division to create multi-lingual guides and programming for accessing local health care, including establishing care with a primary care physician.
3.A7	Advocate for continued health care/hospital use at the Holy Family Hospital campus.

3B. Strengthen community partnerships and programming to increase access to education and job opportunities.

STRATEGY CODE	STRATEGY NARRATIVE
3.B1	Continue strengthening the partnership with the Lawrence MassHires centers to offer regular Career Seminars in Methuen.
3.B2	Continue to support the Adult Learning Center's free or reduced-cost high school equivalency (e.g., HiSET) training program to increase educational attainment for Methuen residents.
3.B3	Continue to work with Northern Essex Community College to establish a Commonwealth Dual Enrollment Partnership (CDEP) to allow students access to early college and increase the percentage of college-ready graduates.
3.B4	Explore more ways of connecting the library, schools, and adult learning opportunities.
3.B5	Promote access to English Language Learning (ELL) programs and citizenship classes for Methuen residents.

Core Theme Four

SUPPORT SOCIAL AND CULTURAL VITALITY AND PRESERVE HISTORICAL ASSETS.

Goals & Strategies

- 4A. Support coordinated educational, artistic, and fun cultural activities and events for all community members.

STRATEGY CODE	STRATEGY NARRATIVE
4.A1	Explore dedicated funding streams and grant programs to support cultural activities and events. Support staff across departments on grant writing for social, cultural, and historical programming.
4.A2	Conduct pilot project placemaking initiatives, prioritizing neighborhoods furthest from open space and recreational lands.
4.A3	Add municipal capacity for cultural activities through dedicated staff, citizen or private groups, or incentivizing volunteers. Encourage collaboration with art organizations in surrounding communities like Elevated Thought (Lawrence, MA).
4.A4	Work with a Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) consultant on strategies to increase diverse cultural programming in Methuen.
4.A5	Better utilize existing facilities for cultural events (Senior Center, High School, etc.)
4.A6	Support ongoing efforts for a new intergenerational Community Center.

- 4B. Increase local awareness and protect historic resources, especially near Downtown.

STRATEGY CODE	STRATEGY NARRATIVE
4.B1	Reevaluate the demolition delay ordinance to include properties built after 1875 (up to a year to be determined) to increase protections for Methuen's industrial history. Extend the demolition delay period from six months to 12 months.
4.B2	Expand the historical marker program for historic resources with a consistent appearance. Consider installing wayfinding and informational signage to accompany historic tours better to promote historic resources, especially in Downtown Methuen.
4.B3	Reevaluate historic preservation regulations to promote modern adaptive reuse.
4.B4	Develop a strategy for maintaining and restoring municipally owned historical structures and assets. For example, reconsider adopting the Community Preservation Act to fund historic preservation and explore using and promoting Historic Preservation Tax Credits to renovate existing historic buildings.
4.B5	Add municipal capacity for historic preservation and property inventorying through full-time dedicated staff.